

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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TAGS: PEPR, PK, MY
SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN EDITORIAL REACTION TO BHUTTO SENTENCE

1. FOLLOWING, FYI, IS FULL TEXT OF MAIN EDITORIAL
WHICH APPEARED IN MARCH 20 EDITION OF MALAYSIA'S
LEADING ENGLISH LANGUAGE DAILY, THE NEW STRAITS
TIMES, ON LAHORE HIGH COURT SENTENCING TO
DEATH OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO.

2. BEGIN TEXT: "LAHORE DECIDES"--IT HAS BEEN
TWELVE KALEIDOSCOPIC MONTHS SINCE ZULFIKAR ALI
BHUTTO AND HIS PAKISTAN PEOPLE'S PARTY WON A

LANDSLIDE VICTORY. THE EXTENT OF THE PUBLIC
DISORDER THAT ENSUED BELIED THE COMPLETENESS OF
THE ELECTORAL VICTORY AND REVEALED THE DEEPLY
ROOTED POLITICAL ANTAGONISMS OF THE NATION.
ALTHOUGH UNABLE TO MATCH THE FORMER PREMIER'S
POPULIST APPEAL, OPPOSITION FORCES HAVE RALLIED
WIDESPREAD PUBLIC SUPPORT. IN RECENT MONTHS, THE
MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATORS HAVE VOICED
INCREASINGLY CRITICAL, EVEN DENUNCIATORY, VIEWS OF
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THE BHUTTO REGIME. GENERAL ZIA CLAIMED TO HAVE
SEEN EVIDENCE IMPLICATING THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER
IN VARIOUS CRIMES INCLUDING THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSIN-
ATION OF A POLITICAL CRITIC. NOW THE LAHORE
HIGH COURT HAS PRONOUNCED MR. BHUTTO GUILTY OF
THAT GRAVE CRIME AND SENTENCED HIM TO DEATH BY
HANGING.

ALTHOUGH THIS IS NOT ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED,
IT IS STILL A MINDNUMBING TURN OF EVENTS. AND
ONE FRAUGHT WITH MUCH POLITICAL DIFFICULTY.
MR. BHUTTO HAS LEFT A PERHAPS INDELIBLE MARK
ON THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PAKISTAN IN HIS
MANY YEARS AS FOREIGN MINISTER, PRESIDENT, AND
PRIME MINISTER. BY HIS SHREWDNESS, STAMINA,
AND FIERY RHETORIC HE HAS SHAPED AND ARTICULATED
DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY, OFTEN MAKING
RADICAL CHANGES. THE CRIME WITH WHICH HE HAS
BEEN CHARGED AND OF WHICH HE HAS BEEN CONVECTED,
HOWEVER, IS OF SUCH ENORMITY THAT THERE CAN HARDLY
BE ANY EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES OR MITIGATING
FACTORS. HE IS EITHER GUILTY OR HE IS NOT.
IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THE PAKISTAN SUPREME
COURT WILL UPHOLD THE CONVICTION AND SENTENCE.
NATIONAL EADERS HAVE BEEN EXECUTED IN THE
PAST--AT THE WHIM OF A DESPOTIC SOVEREIGN OR AS
A RESULT OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE. RARELY HAS ONE
BEEN TRIED AND SENTENCED TO DEATH AS A RESULT
OF HAVING COMMITTED A CAPITAL CRIME. NO ONE IS
ABOVE THE LAW, LEAST OF ALL THOSE WHO HAVE
ATTAINED HIGH OFFICE. BUT IT IS A SAD AND BITTER
HISTORY THAT IS BEING ENACTED IN PAKISTAN."
END TEXT.
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